

A REMARKABLE STAGE ROAD.  
BY C. F. HOLDER.

Among the developments of the Southern Californian region during the past few years, the island of Santa Catalina has occupied a prominent position, from its location and natural beauties, being the popular resort of the people of this section. Ten years ago there were but one or two houses on the island; to-day there is a good sized village, Avalon, on the bay of that name, which has a large modern hotel with smaller ones and cottages by the score.

This growth is due to several reasons. The island possesses great natural beauties, and its proximity to Los Angeles, being but three and a half hours by boat and rail from this progressive city of 115,000 inhabitants, has been a factor in its development. Santa Catalina lies about twenty-five miles off the coast of Los Angeles County, and constitutes one of the southernmost of the chain of islands reaching down from Point Conception and ending with San Clemente. The island is twenty-two miles in length, and is an off-shore spur of the Coast Range, a range of mountains lifted out of the water, presenting the appearance of an emerald in a setting of azure in winter, when the rains have changed everything to a rich green. The island mountains run parallel to the greatest length, and in the center have an elevation of 2,500 or 3,000 feet in several peaks, as Mt. Banning, Orizaba, and Black Jack, which can be plainly seen from the Sierra Madres, many miles distant, constituting the peaks included in the United States Signal Service in their work of signaling up the coast.

The conformation of the island is singular and different from that of the East, owing to the powerful rains, resulting in cutting up the island into a maze of cañons, which are in turn branched and bifurcated to such an extent that the surface is everywhere scored, level tracts being confined mainly to the large cañons. These cañons dominate everything; their mouths constitute the only beaches and approaches, as originally the island had abrupt cliffs which breasted the sea, but in ages the rains in rushing down from the interior have cut deep cañons and branches which have be-

Avalon has a climate which varies little winter and summer. As an example of its singular features, at the present writing, May 27, the thermometer at 2 P. M. and 10 P. M. shows the same, or 60°. The summer days are almost always delightful, the winter the time of flowers. Having such conditions, Santa Catalina has deservedly acquired a reputation as a health and



AVALON BAY AND VILLAGE, SANTA CATALINA ISLAND, CALIFORNIA.

pleasure resort; and, being also remarkable for its game fishes, people have come here from all over the country. For many years the upper and almost inaccessible interior was reached by narrow trails which tested the nerves of the tourist. The interior island had good hunting, a different climate, and so many natural attractions that the owners of Santa Catalina decided to build a stage road from one end of the island to the other. This has been nearly accomplished, giving a fine roadway, which, owing to the remarkable difficulties in the way, is one of the most interesting pieces of construction in the Western country. The proposition was to build a ten per cent grade road fifteen feet in width up and over a series of five deep cañons and along their precipitous sides to the summit of the island, then across in a northwest direction to Little Harbor on the south and west, eleven miles, and from there in a northerly direction eight miles to what is known as the isthmus. The average observer, contemplating the steep cañons which lie about Avalon, would have pronounced this road impossible, yet the

ing winds. The coach road begins on the north side of the entrance to this cañon, passing over what was once the site of a populous native town. It leads up from Avalon, then takes a sharp turn, and skirts the edge of Grand Cañon, running out to the point, then turning abruptly and beginning the ascent of Descanso Cañon. The road is a ten per cent grade, and from here was cut on the face of what was much of the way a steep, precipitous cliff, the slope being so steep that a rock would roll rapidly to the bottom, hundreds of feet. Descanso Cañon is winding and filled with verdure, and the view charming and attractive; the eye resting now on the upper range in rich grays against the sky, now on the river of green winding below, or, as the coach and six turns, on the blue ocean that extends away thirty miles to the mainland, where, thirty or forty miles further, loom the snow-capped Sierra Madres.

Following the face of this cañon, the road gives several fine horseshoe curves, which afford the whip ample opportunity to display his skill in six-in-hand driving. For a mile or two the road gradually rises up Descanso, the coach seemingly in the air or suspended over the trees of the cañon bed; now it is on the bare and rocky face of the cliff; now reaching the head of the cañon, it dives into a low forest of wild lilac, greasewood and others, turning again to descend with a rush, facing the sea. So precipitous are the sides of the cañon and so sharp the turns, that several loops have been brought into play, the coach and six turning on itself, without which it would be impossible to continue, owing to the sharp point of the mountain spur. At these loops the coach seems moving out into space over an airy cape that terminates abruptly; but once up to it, the road is seen to turn gracefully, forming a half figure eight, the coach crossing its own tracks and entering the third cañon.

The road now runs parallel to the sea awhile, then following the third spur, turns and apparently runs down to the ocean. But this spur is soon surmounted and the turn into another cañon made; and thus turning and climbing, and by the aid of three ingeniously constructed loops, the coach reaches the summit of the



NEW STAGE ROAD OVER THE MOUNTAINS, SANTA CATALINA ISLAND, CALIFORNIA.

come filled with verdure. The sea has ground up the rock and formed beaches, and in this way the east and south slopes have been supplied with shallow bays and coves, each being the mouth of a cañon and bearing a stream either at the surface or beneath the sand, after the fashion of many California rivers. The island lies in the great Japanese current, and

result has shown the reverse, and one of the most picturesque and attractive stage roads in the country has been opened up. Avalon lies on a perfect crescent shaped bay, the natural mouth of Grand Cañon, which extends across the island at the south end, almost cutting it in two, a lofty ridge being the barrier and breaking the prevail-

island at this portion, standing apparently directly over the water, 1,500 feet above it. From here a magnificent panorama is displayed, and the entire contour of this portion of the island seen. From the coach one looks down upon the coast, with its green slopes, its white, sandy bays and beaches, and, most striking of all, Grand Cañon with its maze of cañons, well illus-

trating the undoing of mountains and the making of cañons in California.

This has been the most difficult part of the road, and it may be of interest to note, in passing, some of the items of construction. The route was selected and the grade established after much difficulty, many problems presenting themselves, but the eleven miles already completed from Avalon to Eagle Camp was built in five months, with a gang of from thirty to fifty men and twenty-eight horses, at an expense of about \$20,000. As stated, the grade is ten per cent, and about 140,000 yards of material were removed, in which eight tons of powder were employed in blasting the rock from the mountain side. In reaching the summit five cañons were crossed, or rather passed, without the aid of a bridge, all the curves and natural indentations being followed—a feature which adds much to the attractiveness of the drive.

From the summit the road extends for a long distance parallel with the front ridge of the island, affording the observer a constantly changing view of cañons which enter the sea north of Avalon and south of Long Point—a high cape. Not far from the natural base of one of the highest peaks is the widest portion of the island—about 8 miles. Here the longest cañon begins, winding down, first as a narrow gulch, gradually widening out into a flat level plain, encompassed by the peaks, Mount Banning, Orizaba, and Black Jack, and the ridges about them.

An interesting feature of this drive is that it passes several ancient town sites where the aborigines lived, the heaps of abalones at the mouths of the cañons telling the story. North of Black Jack is an ancient olla manufactory, where the natives made their stone mortars, which they sent to the mainland for exchange. On the fronting ridge the writer found evidences of an arrow manufactory—bits of broken arrows, flint, and heads in various stages of completion.

Once in Middle Ranch Cañon, the six-in-hand gallop along the fine level roadway, finally reaching Eagle Nest Camp beneath a group of sycamores, which constitutes the terminus of this section of the road at present. From this point the road has been surveyed to Little Harbor, and owing to the amount of rock to be blasted, it will be the most difficult portion to build. Little Harbor has its inn, and from here to the Isthmus, eight miles, the road is completed, rising to the divide, above the Isthmus, where there was a large Indian village, then pitching down suddenly, with many fine curves around various cañons, ending on the sandy beach, giving the traveler nineteen miles of staging and five of horseback riding, assuming that he has taken the entire trip.

There are several famous stage roads in California, but it is safe to say that none exceed this in novelty, by which the coacher is treated to a constantly changing panorama of mountains and ocean in a climate which will make this island one of the great sanitariums of the world.